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UNICEF ASSISTANCE TO PALESTINIAN CHILDREN AND WOMEN

A review paper

SUMMARY

The present document has been prepared pursuant to Executive Board decision 1994/R.2/7 (E/1994/34, E/ICEF/1994/13). Recommendations for programme cooperation for Palestinian children and women in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank and Gaza are contained in document E/ICEF/1995/P/L.30, which is being presented to the present session.

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	BACKGROUND	1 - 5	2
II.	HISTORY OF UNICEF ASSISTANCE	6 - 10	2
III.	RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	11 - 15	3
IV.	LESSONS LEARNED	16	4
V.	STRATEGY FOR PROGRAMME COOPERATION	17 - 19	5

* E/ICEF/1995/10.

I. BACKGROUND

1. For two decades, Palestinian children in the West Bank and Gaza grew up in an environment of civil unrest and conflict. Since 1987, when the intifada began, chronic violence and instability have been the norms. Nevertheless, the efforts of United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community organizations have safeguarded the health and education of children and women. In 1991, the infant mortality rate and under-five mortality rate for female and male children were 42 and 39 per 1,000 live births and 55 and 48 per 1,000 live births, respectively, despite the low per capita gross national product.

2. In 1994, the Palestinian leadership and the Government of Israel signed two major agreements. The 4 May Cairo agreement eased the establishment of Palestinian self-government in the autonomous enclaves of the Gaza Strip and Jericho. The "Early Empowerment Agreement" of 29 August defined a framework for expanding the Palestinian Authority, particularly its administrative and financial responsibilities in the social sector for the West Bank. The Ministry of Education took over the primary school system at the start of the new school year, 1 September 1994. The Ministries of Social Welfare and Tourism took responsibility for their respective functions on 15 November, and the Ministries of Health and Taxation on 30 November.

3. These developments have expanded the scope for the United Nations agencies and other donors to work closely with the Palestinian Authority in the development and delivery of basic services. More importantly, the latest developments have underscored the necessity of improving the capacity of the Palestinian Authority, United Nations agencies and other donors in resource management, coordination and accountability.

4. An immediate, positive effect of the peace process and resulting agreements related to children and their parents has been relief from daily fears of violent confrontation with the Israeli army. Also, the handing over of responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority provides a greater opportunity to improve services for women and children. The community has the potential to channel its energy into constructive activities to support human development, with a great challenge to involve youth.

5. However, the Palestinian Authority needs to increase capacity for planning and management of basic services and to improve financing of services for children. Although the peace process is expected to improve economic development in the region, current sources of revenue are limited. Donor aid for services has not met the expectations of the Palestinian Authority. Governmental mechanisms for the delivery of social services and to generate local financing from taxation are still being established. The full implementation of the Cairo agreement, the arrangements for elections, the redeployment of the Israeli army and other issues remain outstanding.

II. HISTORY OF UNICEF ASSISTANCE

6. Between 1980 and 1990, the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office in Amman managed UNICEF cooperation in the West Bank and Gaza. The objectives were to improve services related to early childhood development (ECD), upgrade preventive health services for children and expedite the physical rehabilitation of war-injured children. UNICEF established prototype child development centres for the early detection and rehabilitation of disabilities, trained kindergarten teachers and provided sanitation facilities and basic school furniture. In health, UNICEF provided UNRWA with vaccines, syringes and cold-chain supplies, which contributed to the high coverage of the expanded programme on immunization (EPI) among registered refugees. UNICEF also strongly promoted the use of oral

rehydration salts and oral rehydration therapy, and trained village health workers, traditional birth attendants and health supervisors. In the same period, UNICEF completed a drinking water supply project to protect rain-fed shallow wells in 25 villages. In cooperation with UNRWA, more than 10,000 injured children received physiotherapy.

7. In 1991, the Executive Board requested the Executive Director "to continue to urgently assess the situation of Palestinian children and women and to provide funds commensurate with the expanding needs of these children and women, and to report to the 1992 session of the Executive Board on implementation" (E/1991/33, E/ICEF/1991/15, decision 1991/15). In the same year, UNICEF established a sub-office in Jerusalem, and appointed a resident project officer.

8. Since 1991, the Executive Board has approved the following programmes of cooperation for Palestinian children and women: (a) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in the Syrian Arab Republic for the period 1991-1994, with allocations of $800,000 in general resources and $800,000 in supplementary funds (E/ICEF/1991/P/L.23); (b) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in Lebanon for the period 1992-1994, with allocations of $1,050,000 in general resources and $1,050,000 in supplementary funds (E/ICEF/1992/P/L.32); (c) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in the West Bank and Gaza for the period 1992-1994, with allocation of $2,175,000 in general resources and $2,175,000 in supplementary funds (E/ICEF/1992/P/L.32); (d) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in Jordan for the period 1994-1997, with allocations of $800,000 in general resources and $625,000 in supplementary funds (E/ICEF/1993/P/L.20); (e) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in Lebanon for the period 1995, with allocations of $350,000 in general resources and $350,000 in supplementary funds (E/ICEF/1994/P/L.23); (f) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in the Syrian Arab Republic for the period 1995, with an allocation of $200,000 in general resources (E/ICEF/1994/P/L.23); and (g) the programme of cooperation for Palestinian children and women in the West Bank and Gaza for the period 1994-1995, with allocations of $725,000 in general resources and $35,000,000 in supplementary funds (E/ICEF/1994/P/L.23). Thus, since 1991, the Executive Board has approved allocations of a total of $6,100,000 in general resources and $40,000,000 in supplementary funds. However, the amounts of supplementary funds contributed have been well below the approved amounts.

9. The objectives of the programmes of cooperation included the reduction of infant and child mortality and morbidity; the expansion and upgrading of home- and community-based ECD; improvement in the quality and relevance of education and learning achievement; and the expansion of physiotherapy and psycho-social rehabilitation services for disabled and psychologically traumatized children.

10. The overall strategy of the programmes of cooperation was to strengthen the implementation capacity of local organizations by focusing on specific priority interventions and to promote cooperation among service providers through joint policy planning, information-sharing and coordination. However, the coordination of activities was difficult to achieve. Since 1994, the programmes of cooperation for Palestinian children and women have continued to focus on child health and basic education, while UNICEF has reduced its support for rehabilitation activities, which were largely handed over to UNRWA. UNICEF expanded its activities with the Palestinian Authority for programme planning and capacity-building.

III. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

11. Cooperation with the Palestinian Authority enables UNICEF to strengthen the scope of the programme for Palestinian children and women, especially new initiatives which support policy formulation, planning, implementation,

monitoring, advocacy, coordination and mobilization of resources. These new initiatives encompass both capacity-building and service delivery. In addition, a multisectoral approach to cooperation involves the Palestinian Authority and the Ministries of Planning, Health, Education, Youth and Social Welfare as well as local NGOs.

12. To support these new initiatives, UNICEF has strengthened its office in Jerusalem with the appointment of a special UNICEF representative. The staff and other operating costs of the office continue to be covered from programme funds. UNICEF is taking further steps to ensure adequate staff capacity and skills to enhance longer-term development of basic services for children and women in view of the rapidly evolving situation and emerging opportunities.

13. The UNICEF offices for the West Bank and Gaza and the regional office are actively supporting the Palestinian authorities in planning and programme formulation, particularly in education and health. An effort to prioritize and target services for children, youth and women is being made while monitoring systems are being set up.

14. As a follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children and the discussions at the 1992 Arab Child Summit in Tunis, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and UNICEF Executive Director, James P. Grant, agreed during the Organization of African Unity Conference in June 1994, to draw up a national programme of action (NPA) for the Palestinian children. At a meeting in August 1994 with the UNICEF Regional Director and the Special Representative for the West Bank and Gaza, the Chairman of the PLO endorsed the NPA proposal and also expressed interest in setting up a high-level committee for children. Accordingly, UNICEF took initial steps with the Palestinian Authority leadership to formulate an NPA in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian Authority and UNICEF have updated the situation analysis and prepared a report on the status of children and women from the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government of Sweden has pledged support to the NPA process. The Palestinian Authority has agreed to launch the NPA at a conference scheduled for April 1995. The Palestinian Authority and UNICEF will hold workshops on sectoral subjects, such as health and education, in early 1995.

15. UNICEF works closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) in the areas of EPI, the control of acute respiratory infections and capacity-building in the Ministry of Health. UNICEF has established close collaboration with the Ministry of Education; the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); UNRWA; the World Bank; and international donors. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNRWA are supporting a joint programme for youth with UNICEF.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

16. Prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, most pilot projects largely achieved their objectives of assessment and response to needs as well as developing service strategies. Sister United Nations agencies, NGOs and community organizations were key partners in this endeavour. However, the project approach lacked some important elements needed for sustainable development, namely, a strong institutional base and a viable programme framework. The emergence of the Palestinian Authority and its related agencies represents an institutional base. UNICEF support in capacity-building to the Palestinian Authority for management, programming, supervision and coordination is, therefore, essential for sustainable basic services. Capacity-building should also concern NGOs and communities because of their important complementarity. Thus, capacity-building will have two aspects: well-coordinated United Nations inter-agency support for capacity development in the Palestinian Authority, coupled with complementary UNICEF cooperation to

cultivate participation of local NGOs and community organizations. UNICEF is adjusting its strategy for cooperation accordingly, and the United Nations Special Coordinator's office is facilitating the exchange between the United Nations and donors for coordination of support.

V. STRATEGY FOR PROGRAMME COOPERATION

17. UNICEF programme cooperation in support of Palestinian children and women follows a three-pronged approach:

(a) For the immediate and short term, the aim is to strengthen and support the delivery of basic services to rehabilitate and recover what could otherwise become a lost generation;

(b) Simultaneously, there is a focus on local capacity-building as an indispensable aspect of sustainability of services over the medium and long term;

(c) Finally, programme cooperation will support the development and implementation of the NPA for the survival, protection and development of the Palestinian children, women and youth, incorporating the goals of the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

18. Within the strategy outlined in paragraph 17 above, UNICEF cooperation will be directed to:

(a) Advocacy, social mobilization and community empowerment, in cooperation with Palestinian NGOs and community-based initiatives, towards achieving and sustaining the decade goals for children;

(b) Empowerment of women and girls and elimination of gender-related disparities will be priorities at all levels of intervention of UNICEF-supported programmes. Special emphasis will be given to the promotion of children's and women's rights;

(c) Strengthening inter-agency programming within an interrelated, complementary and coherent framework for capacity-building of the Palestinian Authority institutions and service delivery. With the roles of the various agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNRWA and WHO) being defined in relation to their respective mandates, UNICEF will advocate the promotion and monitoring of the decade goals for children, youth and women, and the strengthening of basic services.

19. A monitoring system on the status of children, youth and women, developed in collaboration with the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, will provide the data for surveillance of progress towards key programme goals. An immediate need is to establish baseline data, update existing information and develop gender-specific indicators for a situation analysis and goal monitoring.